

GUT PUNCH TO THE MIDDLE CLASS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I wanted to talk tonight for 5 minutes about the President's latest proposal on Social Security, which I refer to as means testing.

I have to say that from the very beginning, when I heard the President's privatization plan and the other statements he has been making about Social Security, I have very much opposed to what he has put forth, but this latest effort at means testing I think is, in many ways, the worst of all, the worst of his proposals.

I just want to review some of the concerns that I have about his privatization plan, about his means testing in a few minutes here tonight. First of all, from the very beginning, I think, the President gave essentially misinformation because he kept talking about how Social Security was essentially going insolvent and yet we know that it is very solid, if you will, for the next 30 or 40 years. In fact, we have heard different figures from maybe 2030 or 2035, may be the date when we would begin to see less money available for Social Security. But until that time, the Social Security trust fund is very solvent and benefits would continue to be paid on a guaranteed basis the way they have for the last 60 or 70 years.

So from the very beginning, he talked about Social Security in an inaccurate way because he talked about insolvency that does not exist for at least another generation or two. Worst of all, he never indicated that any proposal he had put forth would effectively deal with the eventual insolvency of Social Security.

In other words, Democrats historically back in the early 1980s, for example, when there was a threat of insolvency or that money would not be there in the trust fund, basically sat down with Republicans on a bipartisan basis, back in the days when Speaker O'Neill was the Speaker of the House, a Democrat, and President Reagan, a Republican, was President. And they put forward a commission and they came up with a way of dealing the payroll tax, essentially, so that money would be available to keep Social Security solvent and so that benefits would continue to be guaranteed.

But what the President proposed from the beginning was a very risky privatization plan that essentially would not do anything to help with the potential insolvency. In fact, it would make the situation even worse because we knew that he would be taking money out of the trust fund with his privatization plan and putting money in private accounts. And the consequence of that would be that there would be less money in the trust fund and the solvency problem would be aggravated all the more.

At the same time, the people who put their money in these private accounts, if they made a bad investment, ran the risk of gambling with their Social Security money and not having any money when the time came for them to retire.

The bottom line is we could have gone back, if you adopted this, to the days before Social Security when people were on the street or were in an old age home because they did not have any retirement security. That is what Democrats are afraid of with the President's risky privatization plan.

It gambles with your Social Security. It may essentially leave you broke with nothing, and even beyond that because you are taking money out of the trust fund, the solvency problem is aggravated and the potential looms for severe benefits because if you take the money out and you do not replace it with anything, the only thing you can do ultimately is cut benefits.

Now, what we hear from the President, he was on the road for about 60 days talking about that. At the end of the 60 days period he realized, as did his Republican colleagues, that this was not working. People did not want to hear it. They did not like his risky privatization plan.

So what does he come up with last week in this proposal that he made on nationwide TV? He talks about means testing. What that essentially means is that people, as their income gets higher, would get less and less Social Security benefits. And he made it sound, once again, like this was a great thing because poor people would still get their money and rich people did not need it. But what he fails to point out is reality is who is really being targeted here is the middle class.

It is the middle class person who will have their benefits cut and it is the middle class person who relies the most on that Social Security, much more so than the wealthy person.

I want to point out, I saw an editorial yesterday, Mr. Speaker, by Paul Krugman in The New York Times, and he vividly points this out. He talks about the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and a Jason Furman, who he asked about what the President had in mind.

What he said is that the average worker now pays about \$37,000 and retiring in 2075 would face a cut equal to 10 percent preretirement income. Workers earning 60 percent more than average, the equivalent of \$58,000 today would see benefit cuts equal to almost 13 percent of their income before retirement.

But above that level, the cuts would become less and less significant. Workers earning three times the average wage would face cuts equal to only 9 percent of their income before retirement. Someone earning the equivalent of \$1 million today would see benefit cuts equal to only 1 percent of preretirement income. So in short, this would be a gut punch to the middle

class. It is the middle class that would suffer and is targeted in the President's proposal.

It is a terrible proposal. It is no better than the previous one.

HONORING CRAIG WASHINGTON

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. POE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. POE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor a man who spoke on this floor and wandered these historic hallowed hallways over a decade ago.

Craig Washington, a former Democratic Congressman from Texas, made a name for himself in this place of Washington and in the Lone Star State of Texas.

At home in the great State of Texas, he is best known for his courtroom mesmerizing oratory, his remarkable victories as a criminal defense lawyer and his persistent passion for helping out the little guy.

Eleven years ago, he left Congress and headed back to Texas. Now Washington is back in the spotlight again defending one of Texas' high profile clients and doing what he does best, arguing for constitutional rights, helping the downtrodden. Those are the people who need him the most.

He is gracing the front pages of the Houston Chronicle yet again, but if you ask his daughter, Chival, she claims that her dad is just a regular guy and that is one of the reasons she admires him so much.

Craig Washington was born in deep east Texas, a town called Longview. He grew up in Houston and after high school he enrolled in Prairie View A&M University at the age of 16 with the hopes of becoming a dentist. Eight years later he finally graduated with a grade point average too low to complete his plans of dentistry. He was tremendously intelligent but could not be bothered with attending classes.

In 1966 Craig Washington was introduced to the Dean of the Texas Southern University Law School. Washington had charisma and determination even at a young age, and he managed to talk the dean into accepting him into the law school program and then transferring to dentistry. But instead he was hooked on the law and looked on it for the rest of his life.

Four years later, he would graduate with honors and become the assistant dean and assistant professor of law at his alma mater.

Then in 1970, he left the university to enter private law practice, and in 1972, he was elected to the Texas State Legislature. In 1982, he was elected to the Texas State Senate. It was there he made a name for himself as the second African American to serve in the Texas State Senate since reconstruction. It seems, Mr. Speaker, the war between the States died real hard in Texas.

In 1989, his good friend, Congressman Mickey Leland, was killed in a tragic

plane crash representing this body in Ethiopia. Washington was determined to continue the work that Leland started and he ran for Leland's seat and was sworn in as Leland's replacement in Congress in 1990.

His years in Congress were spent on national issues and advocating for those who had no voice. Some in Texas did not agree with the way he voted and carried himself, but inside this beltway he was seen as a star on the rise. He was a maverick. He wooed his colleagues on many issues and upset more than one organization when he voted against big issues like NAFTA and even NASA.

One particular evening on this House floor he argued against amending our Constitution to protect the flag. He said, "I prefer a man who will burn the flag and then wrap himself in the Constitution to a man who will burn the Constitution and then wrap himself in the flag."

That is typical Craig Washington. Although Craig Washington and I disagree on many political issues, I admire him because he never made a decision based on politics.

Eleven years ago, Washington left this Congress to return to his roots, Texas.

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He has a home in Bastrop, Texas, a small German town near Austin, and today Washington devotes most of his time to fighting for those who have no advocate in our courts.

When I was a prosecutor, we tried cases against each other, and I found his word and handshake were his bond, as it is today. When I became a judge, I had the opportunity to see him represent people in the most serious of accusations. In court, he spoke with the oratory of Daniel Webster and often uses his words with such power, he could put the jury in a hypnotic trance.

Like Spartacus of the ancients, Mr. Washington goes into the pit of the courtroom arena armed with the sword of righteous indignation, the shield of the Constitution, and the breastplate of impeccable honor to fight for those broken of spirit. When Craig Washington does his final summation, I am convinced the angels from above get a seat in the rafters of the courtroom just to listen to his voice, a voice from heaven advocating persistently and passionately for the poor and persecuted.

Craig Washington may be quiet, but he is a hell fire and brimstone lawyer from East Texas that argues a case with such intelligence, intensity, and logic that juries are forever mesmerized. He has the courtroom demeanor and dignity the law deserves and a hallowed respect for the Constitution that is waning today among many lawyers and even some Supreme Court Justices who see the Constitution as an inconvenience to result-oriented agendas.

Politically, Craig Washington, I think, is a populist and an honorable

gentleman from the Old South from an era when honor was important. He serves his clients with distinction and compassion and tremendous energy. He is a tremendous criminal defense lawyer as well as a right-thinking American, and I stand today on this floor where he stood 11 years ago to salute Mr. Washington. I am proud to call him my friend; and if I ever leave Congress, I hope to return to the courtroom to join him in trial, to do battle together against the forces of evil, tyranny, and injustice.

COVER THE UNINSURED WEEK

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. REICHERT). Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. SOLIS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. SOLIS. Mr. Speaker, this week marks Cover the Uninsured Week, running from Sunday May 1 through Sunday May 8. I rise today in support of the goals of Cover the Uninsured Week.

Cover the Uninsured Week will mobilize thousands of business owners, union members, educators, students, patients, hospital staff, physicians, nurses, faith leaders, and many others to call attention to the health care crisis in our country.

In hundreds of our communities across the country, events will highlight the fact that too many Americans are living without health care coverage.

Today, 45 million Americans live without health care coverage, including 8 million children.

As a Californian, I am troubled to learn that California leads the Nation in the number of uninsured people, with 6.5 million people who do not have any form of health care insurance. That is about 18 percent of our population; and additionally, one out of every 5 of our uninsured population in California is a child under the age of 18 years.

Uninsured numbers are even worse for the Latino community, which is disproportionately affected by the lack of health care coverage. As a Latina, I am saddened to see that Latinos have the highest uninsured rate of any racial group; and here in this figure, I would like to point out that back in the year 2003, as my colleagues can see, Hispanics represent 34.3 percent of those individuals that are uninsured. When we look at the different racial and ethnic groups, Latinos are the highest numbers that are uninsured.

The latest census figures indicate that 13 million Latinos are uninsured. That is more than one-third of our total Latino population in the country. This is despite the fact that Latinos constitute the second largest ethnic minority group in the country and have the largest labor force representation. Latinos hold the majority of low-wage jobs in the U.S., these positions mostly do not offer health care benefits.

I want to make a special note of the fact that nearly 80 percent of those without health insurance are employed. Listen, they are employed, but they have no health care coverage. So we have to stop the myth that the uninsured problem is only about people that are unemployed.

In fact, this is a picture here depicting a family in our district that shows people who are working. They are working, but unavailable to them is health care insurance; and in a country that prides itself on equality, it is evident that our health care system is broken when people suffer from a lack of access to health insurance and quality of care.

More disconcerting, Latino children, the most vulnerable group in our society, are 21 percent more likely to be uninsured than non-Latino children. In fact, almost one in three Latino children receives health care through Medicaid or what we know as the State Children's Health Insurance Program, the S-CHIP program. While plenty of Americans live without health insurance, programs like Medicaid and the S-CHIP program are often the only means of providing families like this with health care coverage.

Medicaid is vital for many Latinos, with 9 million Latinos receiving health care through Medicaid alone. Unfortunately, it is sad to say that President Bush's fiscal year 2006 budget proposal would cut funding for Medicaid by \$45 billion, a drastic cut in funding that is a valuable service for health insurance for those who cannot afford it.

We should not play with the lives of families like this and the future of our children by denying them access to critical health care services. Affordable and accessible health care not only decreases the expenses due to last minute emergency care; it allows for a healthier workforce and improves the overall quality of care for all.

Last week, I had the opportunity as Chair of the Congressional Hispanic Task Force on Health, and I was joined by other Members of our Democratic leadership, to highlight our commitment to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities in health care. Our health care system is not meeting the needs of all people. For racial and ethnic minorities and even for Asian Pacific Islanders, for all of our communities, we are sorely underserved by the services that should be adequately provided to all of us.

Democrats are committed to working towards expanding health care insurance coverage for all, and I am committed to addressing the health care needs of all of our communities. The uninsured problem affects every single one of us. Whether it is expanding our Federal safety net, programs like Medicaid, or working to eliminate racial and ethnic health care disparities or providing incentives for our small businesses to offer health care insurance, it is time that we take action now.